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May 26, 1922

Mr. W. Wilbur Hatfield, Editor
The English Journal
Chicago, Illinois

DEAR SIR:

My attention has been called to the article in your April number on the relation of the college entrance requirement to a four-year course in English. The problem is not a simple one. If the allowance for English in the college entrance requirement were raised to four units, one of three things would necessarily happen. The content of the English requirement would be increased and the examination made harder, or the total number of units for college entrance would be raised to sixteen, or the content of the English requirement and the total number of units for entrance would remain as they are. English departments generally in discussing this question assume the third situation. This is probably an unwarranted assumption.

Though but three units are generally allowed for English in the college entrance requirement, the content of the requirement is such that schools find great difficulty in covering it satisfactorily in three years. If four units were to be allowed for English, and the content of the requirement increased one-third, we should be in worse plight than we are now.

The total college entrance requirement is fifteen units. But high schools, while a diploma may be given for fifteen units, expect as a rule sixteen units from the better pupils. There is, then, a leeway of one unit, which is used for different purposes by the schools. Some use this extra unit for English, some partly for English and partly for mathematics (a department which has troubles of its own), and some for various valuable subjects not recognized as college preparatory material. If the allowance for English were made four units, without increase in content, and the total requirement were raised to sixteen units, we should again be worse off than we are now, since it would then be necessary to use for English the one unit of leeway which we are now at liberty to use as we please.

An allowance of four units for English without increase in the content and with the total requirement left at fifteen units would mean dropping out a unit elsewhere. The total entrance requirement, instead of twelve units plus English, would be eleven units plus English. Our college preparatory courses are narrow enough now. How many schools would be willing to see them made narrower? Are we not better off as we are, with a fifteen-unit requirement and three units for English?

If we feel sure that we have an English course worth the extra unit, we are free to use the extra unit for it.

A real remedy would be the reduction of the content of the English requirement to an amount which could be well done in three years, and the allowance of a fourth elective unit in English.

The narrowness of our college preparatory courses, in view of the demands of modern life, is borne in on me more and more. Twenty periods a week seems an accepted standard for pupils' work. I believe that we should give our pupils a broader viewpoint and train them as well, if a year's work were five subjects, each four times a week, instead of four subjects, each five times a week. But this means a radical change, reduction of content to balance increase in the number of subjects, and even threatens the sacred definition of the "unit."

Yours very truly,

WILLIAM C. HILL

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JUST AS IT OCCURRED¹

The project in which I am especially interested just now is that of two-minute lectures or talks by my eighth-graders, of whom I have three classes, numbering in all about a hundred and thirty pupils. These "lectures" must be of an informational nature and something which will be of general interest to the class. Each talk is followed by general discussion, which the teacher endeavors to lead in such a direction that some pupils will be interested enough to pursue the topic still further. Talks today ranged from a talk on "Coffee Production" to one on the latest big guns which the United States has had constructed. The former brought out questions and answers on blending of coffees, powdered coffee, the plants, etc. The latter led directly to a discussion of the disarmament problem.

As to method of approach, there is nothing to be said except that I asked that each one prepare himself to speak on some topic in which he was interested and in which he thought the class would be interested. Almost every pupil is eager to give his talk, as it gives him a chance to display an array of facts which the others have not at their command, while the ability to answer the questions put to him gives him the standing of one of authority on the subject.

LILLIAN E. WHITON

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¹ An informal account, taken directly from a letter.